NATIONAL ROMANTICISM APARTMENT BUILDINGS OF RIGA

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The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was a turbulent time of political and social changes, a time of national awakening all across Europe and the time of Art Nouveau in the art processes. New artistic ideals and new social and national ideas got interwoven in the National Romantic trend of Art Nouveau. However, driven by the same spirit, the visual and artistic expressions of the trend varied both in character and in scope in various urban centres. The Baltic region was one of the most fertile areas for new artistic ideas acquiring a deep response inside entire society at the beginning of the 20th century, and architecture became one of the most powerful means of expressing those new ideas. Subsequently, Art Nouveau became of particular importance in Riga's architecture, being the city's main asset on account of which its historical centre, covering more than 420 ha, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997. According to Jānis Krastiņš, the leading researcher on Riga Art Nouveau architecture, three trends of Art Nouveau could be distinguished in architecture of the city: Eclectic Decorative Art Nouveau, National Romanticism, and Perpendicular Art Nouveau. Almost every third building in the central parts of Riga is built in one or other trend of Art Nouveau, this being a result of enormous construction activities carried out from the end of the 19th century up till the beginning of the 1st World War. “Such a concentration of Art Nouveau architecture, and of such a high artistic standard, is not to be found in any other city in the world. Riga is a true metropolis of Art Nouveau.”[1]

This paper is devoted to the National Romanticism trend of Art Nouveau in Riga. It provides an insight into tendencies of Riga architecture during the period displays the sources of inspiration and their application in architecture of Riga as well as studies specifics of National Romanticism architecture of Riga in its context of other trends inside Art Nouveau of the city. The architecture of three main architects working in the trend will be analyzed in a more detailed way. In addition, the paper briefly touches upon influences of National Romanticism ideas on Riga architecture and art during the following decades of the 20th century.

The reign of National Romanticism in Art Nouveau architecture of Riga was brief (1905-1911), but productive. Fuelled by a half-a-century long process of national awakening, aspirations of Latvian property developers and architects (K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube and A. Vanags being the most productive among them) strived to create new scenery for the city. Romanticizing the early medieval history of Latvia, the style derived inspiration both from local vernacular architecture and general Nordic, especially Finnish, contemporary architectural trends. Rapidly developing poetry, literature, arts and stage design provided a general background for the castle-shaped apartment buildings with steep gables, as well as for creative interpretation and broad application of ethnographical ornaments. Corner buildings were the most impressive examples of composition of architectural volumes. The trend of National Romanticism in Riga even anticipated the principles later used in Modern Movement and Art Deco architecture. The romantic attitude towards the nation’s past emerged again and again during the 20th century in Latvia inside various artistic trends, but never achieved the peak and admiration it experienced on the very dawn of the century.

National Romanticism was the most unique and individualistic trend among all the artistic tendencies in the city at the particular time. Krastiņš emphasizes that, besides being an attempt by Latvian architects to create their own national architecture, utilising vocabulary borrowed from vernacular architecture, along with decorative motifs rooted in traditional applied arts, it was “one of the most outstanding phenomena not only in Art Nouveau, but, possibly, within the whole of 20th century architecture”[2]. However, due to the general assumption that the early, Eclectic Decorative Art Nouveau is the “real” Art Nouveau being the closest one to the Western European origins of the style, National Romanticism has not yet achieved the glory and recognition it deserves. In addition, for a long while the story of Art Nouveau on the international level was concentrated around several large Art Nouveau centres[3], omitting the other ones (Riga, for example). Was National Romanticism a style of “small nations” which was hard to be noticed among the mainstream of Art Nouveau? Were the political preconditions responsible for a lack of international interest in the

individual architectural search and aspirations of raising new nations? The diversity of Art Nouveau in various geographical locations suggests that the style had a tendency of being local, individual and national (and not only international and "new" per se) from the very beginning. To be individualistic, to use subjective architectural language instead of given order or anonymous "style", to redefine the artist's individuality as a part of a certain nation or geographic region was one of the main tendencies of the National Romanticism, especially in Riga.

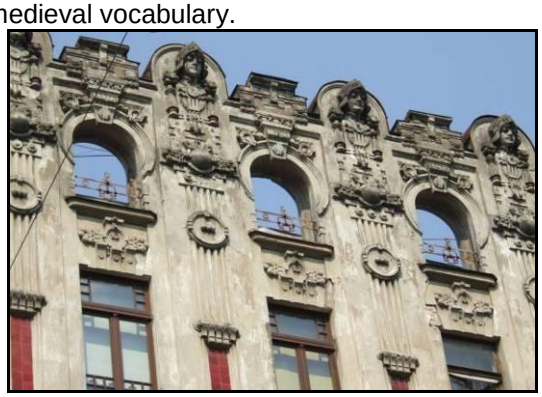
Historically Riga has been famous not only for its international trade environment generally dominated by Germans, but also for its tendency of showing-off, making the buildings and life as rich as possible. Ancient travellers have been particularly surprised by the richly decorated and elaborate dresses of Riga ladies, even if they did not belong to the noble class[4]. Could it be due to general self-confidence of the citizens used to live in a free-town, and to have their own rules above any governor or king bestowed upon them? The lion in the gates of the city's coat of arms leaves no doubt for the spirit of the town. Few, but impressive baroque style mansions in Old Town, recent discoveries of interior decoration, the impressive organ of the Dome cathedral and considerably rich decoration of simple warehouses are testimonies for the historical richness of the town and its citizens' love for decoration in their built environment. Romanticising the past became quite a fashion in Europe during the 19th century: romanticism in literature, music and architecture acquired multiple interpretations. It was the time of the historical novel, time of beginnings of contemporary heritage preservation, and of creation of numerous "ancient" ruins in parks and gardens. Those tendencies might deserve a deeper study, nevertheless, in this paper they are significant mostly for the context of emerging of a particular Latvian romanticism, a localization of general Western tendency.

Warehouse,
Vecpilsētas iela 10, **17th-18th century**

Apartment building with shops,
Pulkveža Brieža iela 2. **1883, F. von Wyganowsky**

In the 2nd part of the 19th century the city borders were opened for new multi-storey construction in former timber suburbs, and the demand for rich and elaborate environment reached an unprecedented scale. There was no free spot left on richly decorated façades, be it eclecticism utilizing various classical motives or interpreting gothic elements. Eclecticism, the dominant architectural style of the 2nd part of 19th century, was mostly history-orientated. It was searching into the past architectural styles for expression of contemporary spirit, mostly attributing certain styles to distinct functions: neo-gothic for churches, neo-renaissance for educational facilities, and classical architecture for impressive public buildings. This approach was used in Riga, too. Neo-gothic architecture was of particular importance for the ancient Hanseatic town since it was regarded as the "national" style for Baltic Germans. Ancient gothic churches with their rich brick decoration, vaults and remains of polychromy was a general source of inspiration for new, impressive edifices created after the pulling down of the fortification ramparts raising around the very medieval core of the city in the mid-19th century[5]. Guild houses in Old Town, several churches in new high-rise residential areas, multiple apartment buildings, and current Academy of Fine Arts (built as Commercial school inside the semi-circle of boulevards) are the most characteristic

examples of romantic neo-gothic architecture searching for a local style via interpretation of medieval vocabulary.

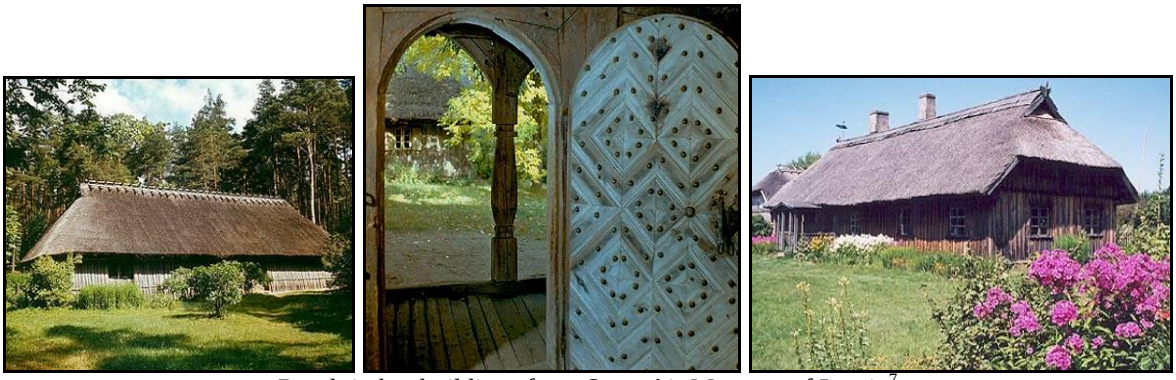


Apartment building, detail,
Alberta iela 2a. **1906, M. Eisenstein**

Apartment building with shops, detail,
Smilšu iela 2. **1902, K. Pēkšēns**

Subsequently, the first examples of Art Nouveau followed the same principles of richness and saturation, and provided an answer to the general demand for contemporary-style albeit evenly decorated apartment blocks. The eclectically decorated trend of Art Nouveau emerged, and here Mikhail Eisenstein's buildings are the most characteristic examples. Parallelly, a distinct strive to adapt the new, contemporary style in a pure way instead of merging it with decoration principles of Eclecticism could be noticed (some buildings by K. Pēkšēns, like on Smilšu iela 2, for example). The architects were aware of the possibilities of new materials, and of the new creative freedom provided by the 20th century. Inspired by Finnish examples, sharing the same autonomy dreams and striving to create a national architecture, Latvian architects turned their glance back to early-medieval times and to the remains of that ancient spirit in vernacular timber architecture. They were searching for roots of unique local architecture to provide the town with a contemporary face in times of a rapidly growing Latvian population (mostly due to growing industrialization and migration from the countryside).

During the 19th century, intensive studies of rural architecture were carried out, and numerous materials were published on the issue, the first systematic studies of both built structures and people of a few Latvian districts being carried out as early as 18th century by famous teacher and scholar J. K. Brotze. The most salient characteristics of the rural landscape were one storey log houses with high pitched roofs clad in thatch or reed. Arranged in groups around a yard or a system of yards, each separate building served one or, sometimes two functions, creating together one homogenous entity – it was Latvian farmhouse or farmyard ("sēta" in Latvian). Details and proportions of these buildings could vary from region to region due to geographical and climatic differences, available materials and taste as well as the owner's wealth. The general shape of a traditional farmhouse is monumental, rising as a grey mount (grey being the natural colour of aging timber) above large fields and meadows. Main decoration for the historical rural timber buildings were metal elements – hinges, fittings, handles. Peculiarly shaped timber columns, railings, beam tips and ridge elements provided a broad field of creative interpretation for rural masters. A distinct influence of baroque architecture could be traced in those elements too (folk costumes also bear a distinct influence of the 18th century fashion). The process of research of historical rural architecture resulted in the creation of the first Latvian and one of the earliest European Open air museums in (decision made in 1924, opening – 1932)(6), in close collaboration with teachers and students of Faculty of Architecture of University of Latvia. Still, it was never just curiosity and a need for study that Latvian architects felt about towards their past. They were always striving for interpretation. At the opening of the museum they even built a replica of an ancient Latvian timber castle (actually, no-one has ever seen a picture or a description of a real one; archaeology, rapidly developing during the 1st part of the 20th century, could provide information mainly on the layout, but not on the 3rd dimension of ancient fortifications erected on nearly every castle mound of the Latvian land in the ancient times).



Rural timber buildings from Open Air Museum of Latvia[7]

The idea of a timber castle was richly represented in stage design of end 19th – beginning of the 20th century (and further on, too) due to a broad range of ancient-times-based plays provided for spectators at the time. It was the Latvian way of recreating the historical events, and this was the first time that a Latvian version was provided of everything that had happened in the past, starting from the colonization and Christianization of the land in the 12th and 13th century. It was a huge field to dig into for poets, writers, musicians, artists. Collecting folklore material, studies of archives, launching work, establishing song festivals and generally raising national awareness were characteristic of that period.

The process of national awakening and its expression in the arts, especially in graphical design, makes it easy to follow the development of artistic vocabulary and line patterns and the rapid changes they underwent in a very short time-span. For example, two designs for the Latvian magazine “Mehneschraksts” by the most famous Art Nouveau artist and painter Janis Rozentāls, one from 1899 and one from 1905, display a completely different design approach: the first one is almost realistic, with a serene and romantic touch, while the second is expressive, dynamic, clearly dealing with ancient legend interpretation. His design for the famous “Zalktis” magazine from 1907 is clearly National Romantic, both in symbols and in style of line design – if the ones of 1905 are lithe and suspended, the lines of 1907 are more angular compared to mainstream Art Nouveau. However, the most impressive National Romantic graphical design was created by Jūlijs Madernieks, one of the most famous Art Deco artists of applied arts in interwar Latvia. His design of the “Zalktis” magazine covers from 1908 are amazing studies of angular textile ornament interpretation combined with highly individualistic font design. Could it be regarded as a logical development of the style started by Rozentāls a year before? Only in one respect – Madernieks had been working in a similar style almost from the start of his artistic career, a cover for solo songs edition from 1902 being a clear testimony of that[8].

Traditional timber buildings and interior elements were distinct sources of inspiration for young Latvian architects. However, until the beginning of the 20th century it was a material not only for rural, but also for urban structures. Timber was the main construction material for the suburbs of Riga before the mid-19th century. This was due to fortification demands – the suburbs were supposed to be burned down quickly in case of enemy approach. In actual fact, it happened once. In 1812 an alarm came of the Napoleonic army approaching the city, and the great fire took place[9]. The alarm turned out to be false, but the city lost almost its entire timber heritage prior to the 19th century. Timber buildings in classical style and, later on, eclectically decorated buildings of one or two storeys were erected during the 1st half of the 19th century. They were striving to follow the architectural vocabulary of classical masonry architecture, while wood-carving laces used in decoration of mid- and late 19th century buildings are rich and elaborated, and derive from natural features of materials, too.

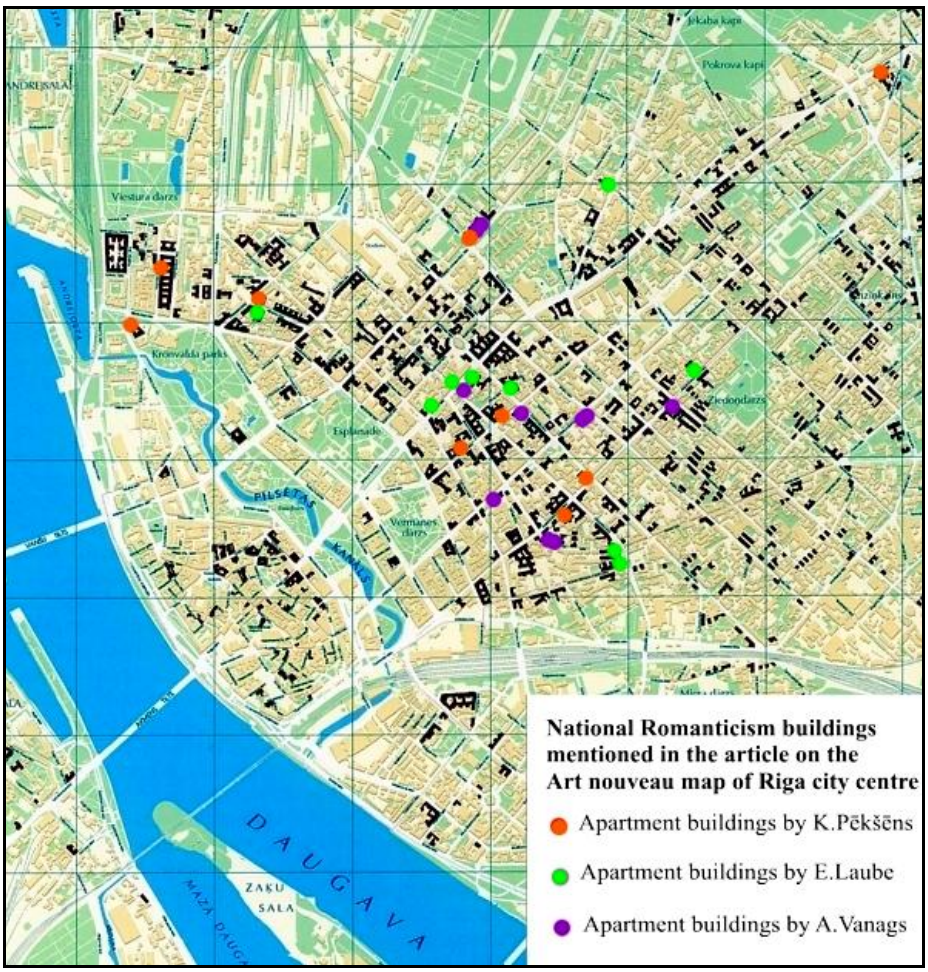
Urban timber house, **1st part of the 19th century**

Urban timber house, **2nd part of the 19th century**

The timber buildings of the Art Nouveau period in general follow the same tendency, and interpretation of masonry elements and curves are characteristic for early structures like those in the Jūrmala seaside resort villas[10], or apply Heimatstil (German variety of National Romanticism based on historical fachwerk elements). This tendency is apparent in the Mežaparks garden suburb of Riga with single-family villas or twin houses[11], as well as in the outer suburbs with workmen's dwellings (small-story mini-flat apartment houses, for example, in Ropažu iela 15, 1911, architect J. Alksnis).[12]

It was National Romanticism that brought new tendencies and approaches towards composition in the masonry architecture of the city. Sources of inspiration were gables, silhouettes of vernacular architecture, timber carvings, textiles, ornaments, colours and richness, and also international interaction, availability of information about folk art and architecture and ornaments of other nations. It was the time of search for the own nation's context in a broader space of culture and time. This last aspect was crucial as peoples were longing to belong to “old” history, to have an ancient past, to defend a nation's right to be called mature and culturally, historically rich. For the emerging nations it was of great importance to have an “ancient” history. Therefore, an ancient castle became one of the ways to redefine historical continuity, to span the periods of greatness and independence separated in time. The characteristic features of the new masonry architecture were the general elaborated composition of volumes, the expressive skyline of the edifice, and the particular approach towards the corner turret – a discovery of eclecticism in Riga acquiring its full development and breath with Art Nouveau style. Natural material, true material, ornamentation and decoration – ornament, motives and stories of folklore – all made their way into architecture. In Riga, Latvian National Romanticism was not only a new way of artistic expression, it was also a way of expressing long-hidden hopes and aspirations for national and political independence, the feelings that couldn't be expressed openly in public after the oppression of the 1905 revolution[13]. National Romanticism was a result of a huge national awakening process that took even the nation itself by surprise and has not been recognized in its full height and importance to this day.

The population of the rapidly growing city was also changing: in 1897, Riga had a population of 282 230, a figure that swelled to more than half a million by the eve of the First World War. The ethnic composition also changed: in 1868, 42.9% of the population were Germans, 25.1% were Russians and only 23.6% were Latvians, but by 1913 these figures were 13.3%, 19.3% and 42.2%, respectively(14). Only local architects were active in Riga at that time, most of them being graduates of the Riga Polytechnic Institute, where a Faculty of Architecture was opened as early as 1869, just a few years after the establishment of the university itself.

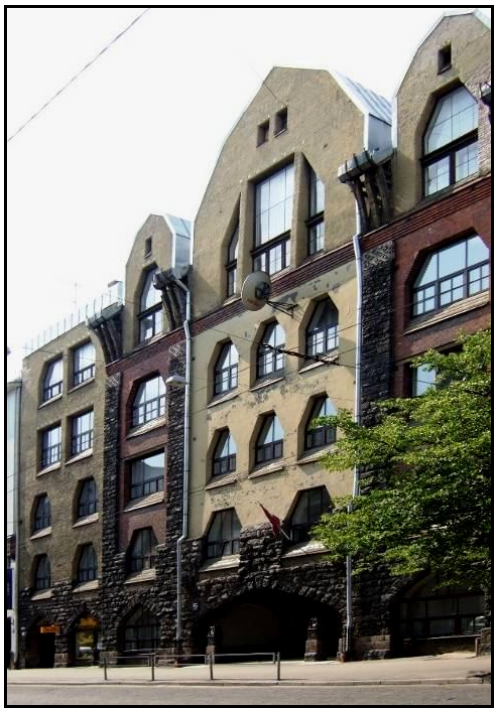


Art Nouveau map of Riga[15] with the buildings designed by K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube, and A. Vanags

Most of the masters of architecture in Riga during the previous century were eager to follow all the new trends architecture had to bring as an answer to society's demand. The great construction activities of the beginning of the 20th century provided a place for every architect to explore his creativity and ability to translate the spiritual and national aspirations into new apartment buildings. Still, among all the masters[16] and even all the architects (regardless of their nationality) contributing to National Romantic architecture of Riga there are three architects of crucial importance, each of them providing a contribution of more than ten distinctive apartment buildings of this Art Nouveau trend. They are: Konstantīns Pēkšēns, Eižens Laube and Aleksandrs Vanags.

In 1903, Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859-1928) was a well-known practising architect in Riga who worked in various eclecticism trends. His own apartment block, presumably designed in collaboration with the famous Latvian painter Janis Rozentāls, could be regarded as the first attempt of National Romanticism style in its Nordic understanding, even if the very beginnings of the trend in Latvia are attributed to 1905. The building located on the corner of Alberta iela and Strēlnieku iela (address Alberta iela 12) had both the expressive composition of architectural volumes and elaborate decorative elements, inspired by the love towards nature and the romanticising of medieval past in Art Nouveau. The spiral staircase and the entrance hall of the building were decorated presumably by design and paintings of Rozentāls (there are no official records of his participation available, however, the style of the paintings is very close to the artist's work), while the top floor of the building was made into his flat and study with skylight provided from the east. This building could be regarded as the most Finnish-inspired one in Riga – the very wife of the artist was a famous Finnish opera singer. Could it be that the devoted husband asked the architect to decorate the building with pine-tree cones and other elements from the lady's homeland? There are more guesses for the legend than documentary answers. Young Eižens Laube collaborated on the design of this building, too. Currently the museum of Janis Rozentāls and of Rūdolfs Blaumanis (a famous Latvian writer residing for a while with the Rozentāls family) is located in the artist's flat and is available for visitors.

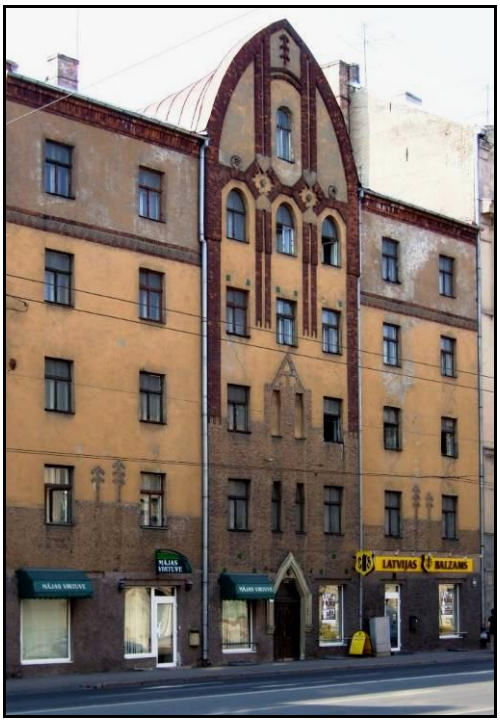
Apartment building (K. Pēkšēns' house), Alberta iela 12. **1903, K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube**[17]



Atis Ķeniņš'school building, Tērbatas iela 15/17. **1905, K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube**

Two closely located buildings on Tērbatas iela mark the early steps of "real" National Romanticism in K. Pēkšēns creative life: Atis Ķeniņš's school (1905, Tērbatas iela 15/17) and apartment building on Tērbatas iela 33/35 (1906). The school is one of the few public buildings designed in this trend of Art Nouveau, and it displays all the philosophical and formal elements of National Romanticism: steep, angular gables, "Latvian arch" for window openings (windows with tapered upper parts), application of natural stone (so scarce and, therefore, so valuable in the country) and exposed timber bearing elements in elevation, ornament borrowed from folk art, and a bit of general Art Nouveau touch via floral motives on tiles. Even the window patterns were turned "upside-down" – a finer division of window-pane was used for the bottom of the window, while the top had large glazing. All of those elements had to represent the contemporary and national spirit of the school that was going to build a new generation of bright and educated people and prepare them to build anew life and country for their nation. The school has a symmetrical composition of elevation, while the apartment building a couple of street-blocks further on has asymmetrical composition of volumes, and the details and elements used are more rounded and cosy even if the general principles and the touch of the same hand could be easily noticed. Still, another apartment building by the same architect on Slokas iela 31, outside the centre on the opposite side of the Daugava River, bears the expressive and asymmetrical composition characteristic to Art Nouveau, while decorative elements of historical styles are also present in its elevations.

The apartment building on Brīvības iela 192 (1907) is a characteristic example of a remote area architecture – the façade is plain, without any expressive volume articulation, while the central gable has an elaborate ornamental décor in darker textured plaster, and the entrance portal is decorated in National Romanticism style, too. Another, more centrally located and almost free-standing, apartment building with shops built in Kronvalda bulvāris 26 the same year displays variable interpretations of steep gable, while the elevation finish is executed in similar plain manner. Here, various plaster textures are used in combination with ornaments on plane surface; natural stone is applied for the finish of the ground floor, and elaborate timber and metal design for the entrance doors.

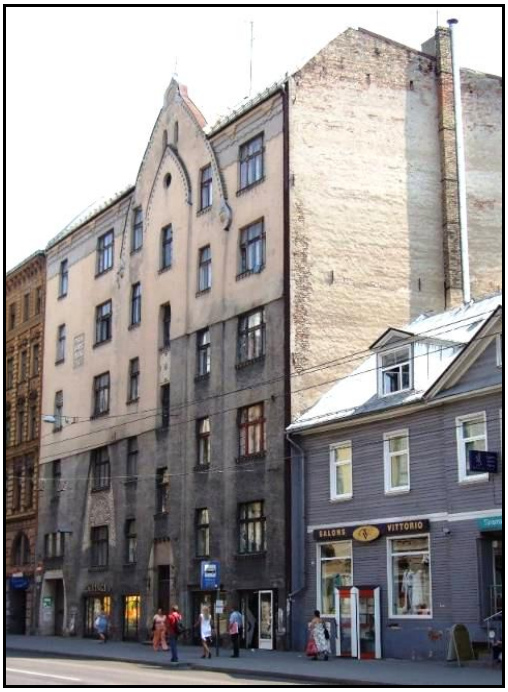


Apartment building with shops,
Brīvības iela 192. **1907, K. Pēkšēns**

Apartment building with shops,
Kronvalda bulvāris 26. **1907, K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube**

Within just a couple of years, the Art Nouveau of Riga moved in its development from richly saturated, sculpture- and statue-decorated buildings towards laconic and refined architecture of surfaces and volumes. The apartment building of K. Pēkšēns from 1908 on Vīlandes iela 10 has a characteristic asymmetrical composition of the façade, its dark grey elevation being decorated with ornamental reliefs on entrance portal and gable, while sculptural reliefs are applied on bays. The corner building (Ģertrūdes iela 46) from the same year has only subtle ornamental décor in rougher and darker plaster for the first floors and corner turret, while the rest of the façade is almost plain. The most characteristic element of this building is the cucumber-shaped cupola of the turret – a more than 100 year predecessor to the famous Foster building in London, UK.

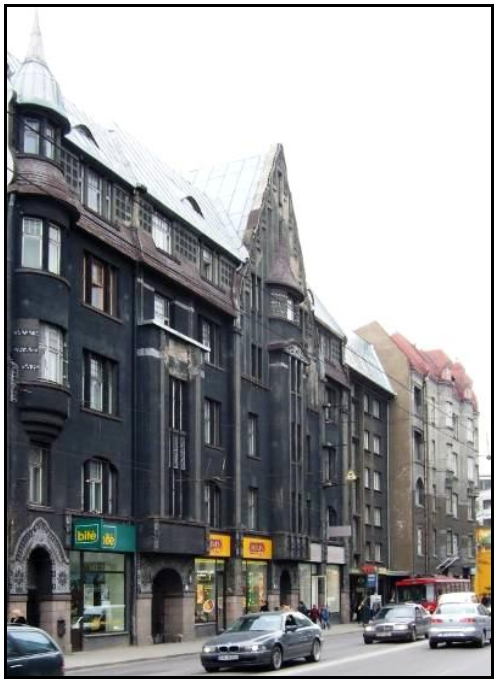
Apartment building with shops,
Ģertrūdes iela 46. **1908, K. Pēkšēns**



Apartment building with shops,
A. Čaka iela 26.**1909, K. Pēkšēns, E. Laube**

In 1909 K. Pēkšēns designed the last building in the National Romanticism style – the famous “Mans nams ir mana pils” (My house is my castle – in Latvian) apartment building on Aleksandra Čaka iela 26. It is one of the most laconic examples of Art Nouveau in Riga, asymmetric composition of elevation is made in two-colour plaster, volumes almost not protruding out of the main plane of the façade, and the inscription on the façade concerns the inner feelings of the owner expressing the spirit of the time, but not the actual castle-shape of the structure – quite the opposite, this is the building furthest from a castle one could imagine.

Apartment building with shops (A. Krastkalns’ house), Brīvības iela 47. **1908, E. Laube**
(*on the right*: Brīvības iela 58. **1906, A. Vanags**)



Apartment building with shops (J. Virsis’ house), Brīvības iela 62. **1908, E. Laube**

Eižens Laube (1880-1967) started his creative carrier at Konstantīns Pēkšēns’ office while he was still a student at Riga Polytechnicum. He collaborated for various designs of the master, and opened his own practice in 1908. It was National Romanticism that influenced the first stage of his creative life, four distinctive apartment buildings being designed by him during this very year. The apartment building on Miera iela 27, on the outskirts of the centre, is quite a rustic structure with traditional stone on the first floor, some floral motives on reliefs and a combination of small steep gables and traditional, baroque style turret on the corner, while the remaining three designs are iconographic for the National Romanticism trend in general. The building on the corner of Brīvības iela and Lāčplēša iela (Brīvības iela 47, commissioned by Andrejs Kratkalns – the first mayor of Riga of Latvian origin) derived inspiration from a similar design in Finland executed on a smaller scale (E. Laube and A. Vanags visited Finland in 1905)[18]. The white building has a powerful composition of steep-gabled volumes, innovative interpretation of corner turret, and variety of windows still united in one style. Details and ornaments are mostly monochrome, while on Lāčplēša iela’s elevation under the cornice is located a coloured freeze with floral motives.

The apartment building with shops in Brīvības iela 62 (original owner J. Virsis), opposite to the Krastkaln’s building, is a dark grey structure with a white geometrical ornamentation, a creative interpretation of ancient folk ornaments, and an asymmetric arrangement of volumes and bays. Were it not for the serious darkness of the structure (various shades of grey and brown were associated with natural materials and the colour of natural timber, i.e., a real Latvian architecture, at the time of National Romanticism) it could be regarded as one of the most playful examples of National Romanticism architecture in Riga. A rare decorative element, sculptural relief in brick, is used on the elevation of the building depicting an allegory of Sculpture and Architecture in vernacular, almost naïve female bas-reliefs with a distinct touch of Art Nouveau.

Apartment building,
Alberta iela 11. **1908, E. Laube**

Apartment building with shops,
Kr. Valdemāra iela 67. **1909, E. Laube**
(*on the right*: Kr. Valdemāra iela 69. **1909, A. Vanags**)

One of the most impressive buildings is the one on Alberta iela 11. Located on the opposite side of the street lined with exaggerated, richly decorated edifices by Mikhail Eisenstein, the light-grey building in heavy, rustic national Romanticism architectural language could be regarded as a rural relative accidentally landing on a city gala-night. The grey colour broadly used in this trend of Art Nouveau derives from the ageing, not-painted timber of rural architecture. The symmetrical composition of gables and turret-like bays is an interpretation of an ancient castle. The natural materials used for the finish of façade contribute to the general principle of honesty of the new architectural style (natural stone, natural slate, copper etc.). The ornaments used for the façade decoration are a free interpretation of folklore motives of both Latvian and general Nordic ornaments. The general spirit of the house and the particular window shapes closely correspond to the design principles of Ķeniņš's school by K. Pēkšēns, providing an insight into the creative interaction and development of new the formal language in the early 20th century Riga. A volume composition similar to the one on Alberta iela was used by E. Laube in 1909 for a house on Aleksandra Čaka iela 83/85, still, the general image of the building is more geometrical and lacks in richness of decoration. The elaborate steep-gable corner structure on Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 67 designed in the same year is far from being only geometrical and plain. It is an impressive edifice with powerful composition of volumes which breaths a spirit of greatness and bears a distinct mark of ancient glory. Every floor is subtly different from the others, every flat has at least one window which is different from the others. Low bas-reliefs on the façade contribute to the spirit of the edifice, providing a touch of natural and folklore elements.

Apartment building with shops,
Brīvības iela 37. **1909, E. Laube**

Apartment building with shops,
Lāčplēša iela 51. **1909, E. Laube**

1909 was the last year Eižens Laube made any design in the National Romanticism trend of Art Nouveau. The apartment building on Brīvības iela 37 – an asymmetrical light-grey structure with subtle ornament décor (a relief depicting three owls being one of the most cute, still spiritual ones in Riga) is flanked by a building that Laube designed in 1929-1931, a distinct example of the Modern Movement. Laube designed three corner buildings in 1909 that could also be attributed to National Romanticism – at least by their composition of volumes that reminds of an ancient Latvian castle, if not so much by general decoration. Actually, the geometrical, rectangular shapes of corner turrets of the buildings on Ģertrūdes iela 23, Lāčplēša iela 51 and Lāčplēša iela 70, 70a, 70b anticipate the functionalist architecture of the 1920s. Those examples provide an insight into the development of an architect through the first half of the 20th century leading towards the very rational architecture of the Modern Movement.

The third most productive architect of National Romanticism trend of Art Nouveau in Riga was Aleksandrs Vanags (1873-1919). Even the place of this architectural style in his creative life is more important as for the other two of his colleagues due to the fact that he passed away soon after WW1. He was the most sincere and devoted researchers of Latvian ethnographic buildings and an interpreter of ancient traditions and folklore motives in his architecture. He started his professional career in K. Pēkšēns office, and opened his own office in 1905[19]. He employed a variety of architectural approaches, although, according to Krastiņš, he was at his best in National Romanticism, and "the works of A. Vanags represent the most comprehensive and direct inventory of results in the search for national identity in the art of construction"[20].

Apartment building with shops,
Ģertrūdes iela 26. **1908, A. Vanags**

Apartment building with shops,
Avotu iela 3 and 5. **1907 and 1906, A. Vanags**

In 1906 A. Vanags designed the apartment building with shops on the corner of Brīvības iela and Lāčplēša iela (address: Brīvības iela 58), on the opposite corner from the one on which E. Laube designed Krastkalns' house later, in 1908. The house belonged to Jānis Brigaders, publisher, actor and brother to one of the most famous Latvian writers, Anna Brigadere. It comes as no surprise that both the owner and the architect shared a passion for the national spirit and channelled it into the architecture of one of the early examples of National Romanticism in Riga. Semi-circular bays and a round corner turret adore the building, while the most impressive element is the ethnographical ornament applied under the cornice, around the windows and in the attention to detail on doors and interior elements. The apartment building on Ģertrūdes iela 26 designed in 1908 is one of the few buildings in brown plaster finish. The monochrome ornament on the central part of the symmetrical building resembles the ones of textile fabrics and ethnographic embroideries. Two buildings, on Avotu iela 3 and 5, present an innovative search for graphical and three-dimensional ornamentation of facades in order to create a truly national feeling for the inhabitants.

Apartment building with shops,
Kr. Barona iela 30. **1909, A. Vanags**

Apartment building with shops,
Kr. Barona iela 62. **1909, A. Vanags**

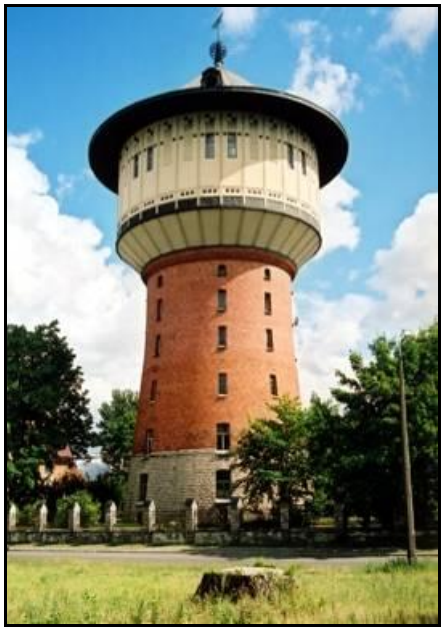
In 1909 A. Vanags designed three buildings with a distinct common feature – the asymmetrical composition of the façade. Here the similarities end as all the buildings are completely different, both in the elements applied and their colour solution. The building on Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 69 (next to the one by E. Laube from 1909) has two bay windows on various heights from the street. The embellishment and ornament follow the dynamic composition. The other building (on Krišjāņa Barona iela 62) has a large entrance decorated with a rich ornamental frieze on the lintel of the gateway, a slightly asymmetrically located bay starting from the first floor and joined by a balcony on the top floor, and a very subtle decoration on the façade. The building on Krišjāņa Barona iela 30 has a distinct horizontal rhythm of windowsills (later broadly used in Modern Movement architecture), an asymmetrically located bay window with rounded corners, and ornamental reliefs almost not protruding out of the façade at all. The building has been renovated recently, and the red-brown polychrome of the façade can be experienced in full brightness now.

Apartment building with shops,
A. Čaka iela 70. **1910, A. Vanags**

The Lutheran Crucufuxion Church,
Ropažu iela 120. **1909, W. Bockslaff**

Aleksandrs Vanags has designed a few castle-shaped corner buildings, too. Two apartment buildings with shops designed in 1910 – on Aleksandra Čaka iela 70 and on Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 73 – have very heavy proportions and bear a distinct resemblance to medieval structures. However, the façades are bright and lightly decorated, and the railings for balconies are in slender metal. The corner building on Krišjāņa Barona iela 64 built in 1911 already has a distinct classical and neo-Egyptian touch, but a slight resemblance to National Romanticism is also noticeable.

Most of the Riga architects did at least some design in the National Romanticism trend of Art Nouveau. It could not be attributed only to architects of Latvian origin – German Baltic architect Wilhelm Bockslaff contributed to the style designing the only Art Nouveau period church of Riga (Krusta baznīca, Ropažu iela 120, 1909; it is located in quite an empty area slowly developed during the 20th century – the idea might have been that the adjacent territory would be built up with apartment blocks in a few years time, but the 1st World War broke out and brought an abrupt end to such dreams), and a few apartment buildings, too. R. Dohnberg and R. Schmaeling each contributed to the trend in 1910, A. Malvess designed a house in 1909. In 1910, the only example of National Romanticism rooted in ancient Russian heritage was even built in Riga – the apartment building on Lāčplēša iela 100, designed by Nikolai Yakovlev. The building displays several motifs from ancient Russian architecture, motifs from fairy tales (including a witch on a broomstick), and a fresco of an ancient town is painted at the top of one of the two differing gables of the building.

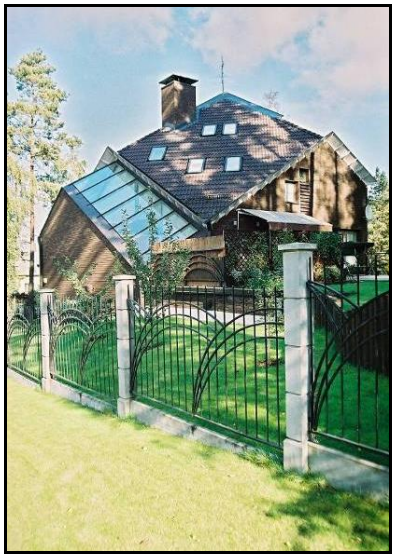


Watertower of Āgenskalns ("Alise"),
Alises iela 4. **1910, W. Bockslaff, 1939, P. Pāvulāns**

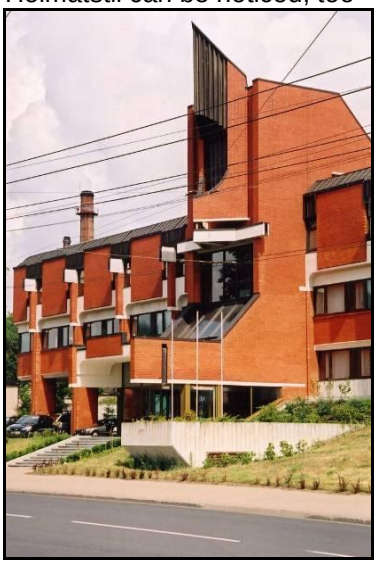
Textile factory watertower in Jugla,
early 20th century

The Riga of today has the rapid industrial development of the city at the turn of the 19th and 20th century to thank for the general prosperity and affordable loan policy that allowed so many citizens, including the rapidly developing Latvian bourgeoisie, to go into the construction business and to build the city as it is known today. However, just a few industrial buildings are built in Art Nouveau style because most industrial premises had already been built before the style even emerged. Still, one can notice the influence of National Romanticism on the water tower of Āgenskalns (also called "Alise") on Alises iela 4 (1910, W. Bockslaff; 1939, P. Pāvulāns). In some of the factory water towers the influence of German romanticism or Heimatstil can be noticed, too[21].

Entrance detail, single family house,
Teika district, **1930s**



Single family house
near Riga, **1990s**



RAF administration building,
1980s

Could it be stated that National Romanticism ended as an artistic approach together with the whole of Art Nouveau at the beginning of the 1st World War? All construction work ceased in Riga, and several more years were to pass before the war damage was repaired. Construction work was revived only in about 1925. Although the epoch of Art Nouveau was already over, several relapses into this style did appear later on, too. In applied arts National Romanticism reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s when it merged with Art Deco. It was a period of Art Nouveau denial and a triumph of the Modern Movement in architecture. However, in Riga there are cases of a successful combination of Modern Movement architecture with elements inspired by National Romanticism such as, for example, in the Teika residential district developed during the interwar period.

Features of National Romanticism could be traced even in the 1950s. As an integral element of Stalin's baroque, national features had to provide a "local touch" and express "the nation's happiness" about the socialist regime. With the 1980s, Regional Architecture became a new name for the design rooted in local traditions and natural materials. It was a local expression for Post-Modern tendencies which swept around the whole world, and the buildings of that time "marked a real turning point from the boring uniformity of 'modern' art of the 1960s and 1970s towards a more creative, expressive and elaborate contemporary Latvian architecture"[22]. Even contemporary buildings sometimes reflect historical and national archetypes of architecture, such as gables, natural materials, and ethnographical ornament rooted patterns. National Romanticism could be a term attributed to a brief period in the history of architecture, but it has opened up a broad possibility of interpretation for architects and provided the general public with a large and diverse vocabulary to express either the highest ideals or the most trivial feelings of local and national character, like in the case of the national-food-restaurant chain "Lido" becoming one of the most popular places for spending leisure time.

Riga is a city striving to be international and unique at the same time. There are only very brief and emotionally charged moments when a city can achieve such a height of architecture – the way it happened during the time of National Romanticism inside the Art Nouveau period of Riga's architecture.

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[1] Krastiņš J. Rīgas arhitektūras stili / Architectural Styles in Riga. – Rīga: Jumava, 2005. – p. 224.
[2] *Ibid.*, – p.226.
[3] *For example:* Art Nouveau. 1890-1914. Ed. By P. Greenhalg. – London: V&A Publications, 2000. – 464 p.
[4] *See pictures and description of Livonian women as reproduced from* Habitus praecipuorum, tam virorum, quam foeminarum singulari arte depicti *in*: Johans Kristofs Broce. Zīmējumi un apraksti piecos sējumos. 1. sējums. Rīgas skati, ļaudis un ēkas / Johan Christoph Brotze. Zeichnungen und deren Beschreibungen in fünf Bänden. Band 1. Rigaer Ansichten, Menschen und Gebäude. – Rīga: Zinātne, 1992. Vol.1, pp. 165 – 171.
[5] *See the new architecture of the period and its perception in:* Riga und Seine Bauten. – Riga, 1903.
[6] Buka O., Krastiņš J., Strautmanis I., etc. Latvijas arhitektūras meistari. – Rīga: Rīgas Tehniskās universitātes Arhitektūras fakultāte, 1995. – p. 109. (*Masters of Latvian Architecture*; in Latvian)
[7] http://www.ltg.lv/brivdabas.muzejs , *accessed 03.09.2006.*
[8] Pujāte I. Jūgendstils latviešu mākslinieku žurnālu grafikā // Jūgendstils. Laiks un telpa / Art Nouveau. Time and Space. – Riga: Jumava, 1999. – pp. 163 – 170 (*English text:* Art Nouveau Graphic Design by Latvian Artists in Early-Twentieth-Century Magazines, pp. 265 – 268)
[9] Krastiņš J., Strautmanis I. Riga. The Complete Guide To Architecture". – Riga: ADD projekts, 2004. – p.8.
[10] (Laiviņa S., Pētersone A., Pētersons R. Etc.) Jūrmala. Daba un kultūras mantojums. – Rīga: Neputns, 2004. – pp. 233 – 235 (Jūrmala. Nature and Cultural Heritage; *in Latvian; available also in English*)
[11] Krastiņš J. Mežaparks. – Rīga: Zinātne, 1997. – 232 p. (*in Latvian; summary in English*)
[12] Krastiņš J., Strautmanis I. Riga. The Complete Guide To Architecture". – Riga: ADD projekts, 2004.
[13] "The constant constrictions of civic rights and freedoms in Russia, the unresolved agrarian issue, the privileges of the landed gentry and attempts to Russify the Latvians were all causes that led to dissatisfaction among the Latvians with the social and political situation. January 13, 1905, the LSDWP declared a general strike. About 20,000 factory workers participated in a demonstration on the streets of Rīga. A widespread movement took hold, and demands were made for improved social conditions and more political rights. In rural areas the movement was geared against the local aristocrats – the German landed gentry, who owned most of the land and who had usurped local power. Later in history books these 1905 events were entitled the "Latvian Revolution." During this revolution several nationally-oriented Latvian Social Democrats publicly voiced for the first time the necessity to unite all Latvian-inhabited regions into an independent State – Latvia." *In:* Latvia in the 20th Century // http://www.li.lv/en/?id=18, *accessed 03.09.2006.*
[14] Krastiņš J. Rīgas arhitektūras stili / Architectural Styles in Riga. – Rīga: Jumava, 2005. – p. 224.
[15] *Based upon a map published in*: Krastiņš J. Rīgas arhitektūras stili / Architectural Styles in Riga. – Rīga: Jumava, 2005. – p. 117.
[16] *For a deep insight into creative work of Riga architects see*: Krastiņš J. Rīgas arhitektūras meistari. 1850-1940. The Masters of Architecture of Riga. – Rīga, 2002. – 360 p.
[17] *Data of the Art Nouveau buildings from*: Krastiņš J. Jūgendstils Rīgas arhitektūrā. – Rīga, Zinātne, 1980. – 224 p. (Art Nouveau in Architecture of Riga; *in Latvian*)
[18] Krastiņš J. Rīgas arhitektūras meistari. 1850-1940. The Masters of Architecture of Riga. – Rīga, 2002. – p. 216.
[19] *Ibid.*, – p. 210.
[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Antenišķe A. Jūgendstils Eiropas industriālajā arhitektūrā // RTU Zinātniskie raksti. 2.sērija: Arhitektūra un būvzinātne. – Rīga: RTU, 2003. – 4.sējums: – 10.–16.lpp. (Art Nouveau in Industrial Architecture of Europe; *in Latvian; summary in English*)

[22] Krastiņš J. National Identity in Modern Architecture: Riga Art Nouveau Metropolis // Architecture 1990. – Dorset: Donhead, 1998. – p. 298–307.